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ABSTRACT

The McDonald's Executive English Course was developed by Carleton University's Centre for Applied Language Studies in response to a francophone supervisor's request. As a basis for course development, information was gathered on English language use on the job, the level of English proficiency needed, and the personalities, backgrounds, and goals of the nine employees who registered for the course. The information was gathered by on-the-job observation, a questionnaire, language tests, and individual interviews. The course was designed thematically, with work-related topics such as stress, advertising, women in business, interviewing techniques, how to run an effective meeting, and how to conduct performance evaluations. The students' expressed need for oral proficiency provided an oral focus for each course segment. Activities were designed for grammar, vocabulary development, reading, and consolidation of learning. Students expressed satisfaction at the end of the 10 week course, and a year later, interviews with three of the students revealed increased confidence in using English and increased interest in learning more. (MSE)

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English in the Workplace: McDonalds Executive English

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The McDonalds Executive English Course was developed and taught by the authors. It was a 45-hour, 10-week program designed to improve oral proficiency. The students were a group of francophone McDonalds managers and assistant managers. This paper describes 1) the background, 2) the needs assessment tools, and 3) the design and implementation of the course.

1. Background

The Centre for Applied Language Studies contracted to provide the McDonalds Executive English Course. This was in response to an inquiry by a McDonalds supervisor for a course in English for himself and a colleague. CALS suggested that it would be possible to provide a custom-designed McDonalds course if numbers warranted. A group of nine students registered. Because of their very heavy work schedules, students could only devote one evening a week to the course. As a result, each weekly four and a half hour class was divided into two sessions. All concerned realized that condensing instruction in this way was less than optimal. This was somewhat offset by having each session taught by

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a different instructor.

The course differed from the usual workplace course in two ways: 1) The client was the student, not the company. Although the company supported the course by paying the students' fees and providing the premises, equipment, etc., CALS was not accountable to the company. The students attended classes on their own and not company time. 2) The course was given at a McDonalds facility which was not, in fact, the workplace of any of the students. Because the students worked in various parts of the city, this location was chosen for its centrality.

2.1. Needs Assessment

In order to plan a program tailored for this particular group of students, information was needed in three areas:

- English language use on the job
- level of English proficiency (beginning, intermediate or advanced)
- the students as people (their personality characteristics, backgrounds and goals for the course).

To get this information four tools were used:

a. observation
b. a questionnaire
c. language tests
d. individual interviews

a) In the week preceding the course, the instructors spent a day observing "on the job". This provided valuable information. For example, information about language functions, structures and lexis was obtained by observing/taking notes at a meeting of English-speaking managers. Information about managers' responsibilities in the areas of staff, restaurant operation and the physical plant came from both an informal discussion over lunch with a group of managers, and from a visit to a restaurant under construction. Information about reading and writing requirements was obtained

from samples of reading materials (eg. employee handbooks, in-house magazines, job application forms, job descriptions, etc.) and writing tasks (eg. statements of goals and objectives, action plans, performance reviews, reports, letters to customers, etc.)

All these sources of information gave an insight into the McDonalds work environment, the management philosophy (Management by Objectives), the company style (very informal) and the tasks managers had to accomplish. This information was then used as the basis for the second tool, the questionnaire.

b) The purpose of the questionnaire was to find out the students' perceptions of their English language use on the job. The questions dealt with language functions, role relationships, mode, channel, topics, and students' expectations from the course. (See Appendix A.)

c) To determine the students' proficiency level, two kinds of test materials were used: a standard grammar test (C.E.L.T.) consisting of 75 multiple choice questions on discrete points of grammar, and test materials created by the authors relating specifically to the McDonalds workplace. The latter included tests of reading, writing, and listening. The reading test consisted of comprehension questions on three passages, graded from short to longer, and specific to general; namely, a phone message, a letter of complaint, and a reading passage from a management text. (See Appendix B.) The writing test was based on the kind of writing McDonalds employees had to do: respond to a letter of complaint or write a performance review of a crew member whose profile was provided. (See Appendix C.) The listening test was in two parts:

- discrimination of numbers, dates, prices, percentages, quantities, weights and measures
- comprehension of a taped conversation.

d) The students' listening skills in face-to-face conver-

sation were further evaluated in individual interviews.

The individual interviews served two purposes: to assess listening and speaking skills, and to get to know the students—their personal characteristics, educational backgrounds, language learning experience and attitudes, and goals for the course. These interviews were not structured but were carried on as an informal conversation.

2.2 Results of the Needs Assessment

The students' responses to the questionnaire reinforced the results of the observation session; i. e. their perceptions of their language needs suggested that all the functions identified on the questionnaire were potential teaching points.

The results of the C.E.L.T. test revealed that these speakers had the problems with structures experienced by most French speakers (e.g. irregular past tense forms, present perfect, etc.) The reading and listening tests seemed to show that the students' skills in these areas were adequate for their work related needs. Although the writing test indicated that improvement was needed, responses to the questionnaire suggested that for all but one student, writing improvement was not a high priority. Conversely, although the assessment of their speaking abilities based on the interviews indicated that all but one communicated adequately, *all* the students felt a need for improvement in this area. This need was expressed almost unanimously as a desire to "feel more comfortable" when using English whether in day-to-day activities on the job, when dealing with head-office or when speaking at meetings.

The students themselves shared many characteristics. Most of them had completed high school where they had studied English. Their further education had been within the McDonalds management training program. They appeared competitive, energetic, willing, extremely hard-working, and very achievement-oriented. They were accustomed to having

to evaluate their own performance as well as that of others. Despite these similarities, however, in the area of oral proficiency in English, the level of the group ranged from a beginner through intermediate to the very advanced.

3.1 Design and Implementation of the Course

The information provided by the needs assessment, the observations and the interviews determined the content of the course, the approach and the presentation of the material. Based on the results, a list of priorities was established for the teaching of linguistic form and function. The degree of commitment of the students to their work suggested a thematic approach based on work-related topics, e. g. Stress, Advertising, Women in Business, Interviewing Techniques, How to Run an Effective Meeting, How to Conduct Performance Evaluations, etc. These themes served as the point of integration for the different segments of the course, ie. the vocabulary, grammar and functions. Finally, the expressed need of the students for oral proficiency required an oral focus for each segment of the course.

3.2 Organizing the Teaching Points

At this stage there were, on the one hand, lists of priority structures, functions, etc. , and on the other, reading selections on a number of themes. Items on the priority list seemed to fall into three categories:

a) those which surfaced in the readings, e. g. comparatives and superlatives of adjectives in readings on advertising;
b) those which, although not intrinsic to the readings, could be related through an activity, e. g. conditionals in a questionnaire for the thematic unit, Women in Business (see Appendix D);
c) those for which new themes had to be selected, e.g. future tense in Planning an Advertising Campaign.

Because the students' primary goal was "to feel more comfortable" when speaking English, interactive activities were

devised for each segment of the course. Examples of these activities included the following:

I *Grammar:* To practice "would rather + (verb)/prefer + (verb)ing", students were directed to find out from other class members their preferences concerning different leisure activities.

II *Vocabulary Activities:* To develop the strategy of guessing meaning from context, students worked in pairs or small groups and discussed which of several dictionary definitions for a given word best suited the context.

III *Reading Activities:* To ensure that each student needed to speak, students were divided into three groups of three. Each group had a different reading text on the same theme with accompanying comprehension questions. Their task was to jointly answer the questions. They were then regrouped so that each group of three now had a representative from each previous group. (See diagram below.)

First grouping:

A	B	C
A A	B B	C C

Second grouping:

A	A	A
B C	B C	B C

The task in the second grouping was to share the information obtained in the texts. There was now a real information gap—each participant had to report on what he had read in order to inform the others. This procedure proved particularly effective for the beginning student, and it was with great pride that the rest of the class realised that "their" beginner was now contributing.

IV *Consolidation Activities:* To provide a realistic context for using grammar, vocabulary, etc. studied in the

session, interactions were devised in the form of role plays and problem-solving activities. These activities paralleled the students' actual work, e.g. evaluating job applications, conducting performance reviews, developing action plans, etc. (See Appendix E.) Because the students were accustomed to working within a framework of goals, objectives and action plans, they were given, at the first session, a clear statement of goals and objectives for the course in terms of pronunciation, vocabulary-building, grammar, speaking/listening, reading, etc. They were also provided with reasonable expectations of achievement: given the brevity of the course, the aim was an *awareness* of problems, and strategies for dealing with them. (See Appendix F.) In addition, at the beginning of each class students received the goals and objectives for each lesson in the form of an agenda for the evening.

Evaluation

At the end of the 10 weeks, students were given the same C.E.L.T. grammar test, with inconclusive results. Unfortunately, because of time constraints, it was impossible to create a functional test. However since the students' stated goal was "to feel more comfortable" when speaking English, an evaluation form was designed (see Appendix G) to determine their perceptions. Despite their recognition of the limitations imposed by the length of the class and the wide range of proficiency levels, the students expressed satisfaction.

A year later, an independent evaluation was carried out by June Tagg, a student in the CTESL program at Carleton. As part of an assignment, she interviewed, by telephone, three of the students from the course: the basic level student, one of the intermediate students, and the advanced student who requested the course. She reports the following:

> The beginning student was able to comprehend and respond to questions, often volunteering details and illustrations, during a half hour telephone conversation. He reports watching television more, and struggling to learn computer English on his own. The other two students were using English much more on

the job. One was planning to give an oral presentation in English the following week. Both these students have English-speaking employees under their supervision and were switching languages with comparative ease and comfort. Both planned to take further English courses this year. One hoped for an English course geared for two or three people at his own competence level; the other said he would enroll at Carleton University. All three students say they knew they were better able to use the English language as a result of the course and they felt very good about that.

NEEDS ANALYSIS

Your answers to the following questions will enable your teachers to plan an English course that will meet your needs in English.

The questions relate to your use of language at work, whether this language is French or English. If you work in English at the moment, your answers will tell us what aspects of English you need now (eg. points of grammar, vocabulary, etc.). If you are working in French at the moment, but there is a possibility that you will have to work in English in the future, your answers will tell us what you will need to know. Read the questions carefully and consider your answers.

I. To do your job, do/will you have to do any of the following:

		NEVER	SOMETIMES	OFTEN	ALWAYS
1.	Ask someone to do something				
2.	Ask someone for information				
3.	Tell someone what to do				
4.	Tell someone how to do something				
5.	Tell someone what happened				
6.	Tell someone what is going to happen				
7.	Tell someone what someone else said				
8.	Make suggestions				
9.	Ask for suggestions				
10.	Make someone accept your ideas				
11.	Insist that someone do something				
12.	Remind someone about something				
13.	Say what you think				
14.	Ask others what they think				
15.	Say how you feel				
16.	Ask others how they feel				

		NEVER	SOMETIMES	OFTEN	ALWAYS
17.	Say that you disagree with someone				
18.	Say that you agree with someone				
19.	Warn someone about something				
20.	Give someone advice				
21.	Encourage someone				
22.	Apologize to someone				
23.	Accept an apology from someone				
24.	Tell someone he/she has done something wrong				
25.	Offer to do something				
26.	Say that something is possible/impossible				
27.	Say that you are satisfied with someone/something				
28.	Say that you are not satisfied with someone/something				
29.	Congratulate someone				
30.	Say "Hello", "Goodbye", "How are you?" etc. to someone				
31.	Talk about prices				
32.	Talk about days/dates				
33.	Talk about times				
34.	Talk about weights and measures				
35.	Talk about percentages				

II. a. What is your position?

Supervisor ☐

Manager ☐

Assistant Manager ☐

Other (give details) ☐ _____

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II. b. To do your job, do you have to communicate with

	NEVER	SOMETIMES	OFTEN	ALWAYS
Operations Manager				
Supervisors				
Managers				
Assistant Managers				
Crew members				
Other McDonald's employees (secretaries, etc.)				
Customers				
Other business people				

III. a. When you communicate with the following people, do you do so by speaking to them?

	NEVER	SOMETIMES	OFTEN	ALWAYS
Operations Manager				
Supervisors				
Managers				
Assistant Managers				
Crew Members				
Other McDonald's employees				
Customers				
Other business people				

III. b. Do you have to communicate with the following people by writing to them?

	NEVER	SOMETIMES	OFTEN	ALWAYS
Operations Manager				
Supervisors				
Managers				
Assistant Managers				
Crew members				
Other McDonald's employees				
Customers				
Other business people				

c. To do your job, do you have to read

	NEVER	SOMETIMES	OFTEN	ALWAYS
Memos				
Telephone messages				
Letters				
Reports				
Evaluations				
Magazine articles				
Operating instructions				
Procedures				
Other material _____				

IV. a. To do your job, do you have to talk to people

	NEVER	SOMETIMES	OFTEN	ALWAYS
Individually				
In a group				

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b. Do you have to talk to people

	NEVER	SOMETIMES	OFTEN	ALWAYS
face to face				
on the telephone				

V. At work, do you talk to your co-workers about

	NEVER	SOMETIMES	OFTEN	ALWAYS
work				
Outside interests in general				
- movies / TV				
- sport				
- politics / current affairs				
- family matters				
- hobbies				
- personal problems				
- other				

VI. What do you hope to get out of this course?

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

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READING TEST Name _____

PART I

Read the message below.

McDonalds

Telephone Message

For: Mr. Smith

From: Mr. Gordon

Telephone #:

- [ ] Please call
- [ ] Will call again
- [x] Returned your call
- [ ] Wants to see you
- [ ] Long distance - call operator number

Particulars of Call

Mr. Gordon from the Citizen is coming to see you on September 19 at 2 o'clock about an article on McDonald's part in the Santa Claus parade.

Date Sept. 12, 82

Time 1 00 pm

Initials

Write T (True) or F (False) beside each statement.

1. Mr. Smith works at McDonalds. ____
2. Mr. Smith called Mr. Gordon. ____
3. Mr. Gordon came to see Mr. Smith. ____
4. Mr. Gordon works for the Ottawa Citizen. ____
5. Mr. Gordon wants to see Mr. Smith next week. ____

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Read the letter below. Then circle the correct answer to the questions which follow.

1930 Main St.,
Ottawa, K1N 3U2
January 5, 1981.

J. B. Smith,
Manager,
McDonald's Ltd.,
_____ St.,
Ottawa, Ontario.

Dear Mr. Smith:

I visited your restaurant at noon on Sunday, January 2, and was very disappointed. I was especially upset because we had visitors from overseas with us.

The parking lot was messy -- the garbage cans were overflowing. Inside, things were just as bad. There was a very long line-up because the girl at the cash couldn't cope with the crowd. Obviously, she was overworked and didn't have enough assistance. When we finally ordered, there was a long delay because the fish filets were not ready. Although we were extremely hungry by the time we got our lunch, we couldn't eat it because the buns were stale. I didn't say anything at the time because there seemed to be no one in charge.

I thought McDonalds wanted its customers to come back. This customer won't return.

Yours truly,

QUESTIONS

1. In this letter, Mrs. Jones is a) making a complaint.
   b) saying thank you.
   c) asking for information.

2. She a) enjoyed her visit to McDonalds.
   b) didn't enjoy her visit to McDonalds.

3. Mrs. Jones came a) alone.
   b) with one person.
   c) with more than one person.

4. The parking lot was a) clean.
   b) dirty.
   c) full.

5. In the restaurant there were a) a lot of
   b) a few customers.
   c) some

6. At the cash, the girl didn't have enough a) hamburgers.
   b) help.

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APPENDIX B
Reading Test

APPENDIX C
Writing Test

Name _____

Do either question A or question B.

You may use an English-English dictionary.

A. Read Mrs. Jones' letter again (Reading Test Part II) and write a reply.

or

B. Read about the crew member, Phil Jackson, below and write a performance review based on the information.

Phil Jackson

- has worked at McDonald's for two months
- is very enthusiastic about the job
- wants to make a career at McDonald's
- sometimes uses incorrect procedures because he thinks he can work faster that way
- makes many suggestions
- appearance is sometimes untidy. His hair has grown until it overlaps his collar
- has already learned to work 4 stations
- his uniform is often wrinkled. Sometimes he wears brightly coloured socks.
- is never late for work
- sometimes wears his name-tag upside down
- once, forgot to call in sick
- doesn't take correction very well

APPENDIX D
Introductory Activity

INTRODUCTORY ACTIVITY - WOMEN AND WORK

A. Mark on a scale of 1 - 5 how comfortable you would feel in each of the situations below.

1. very uncomfortable
2. uncomfortable
3. indifferent
4. comfortable
5. very comfortable

How would you feel if:

1. the auto mechanic working on your car were a woman?
   1 2 3 4 5
2. the person who came to fix your fridge were female?
   1 2 3 4 5
3. the person repairing your snowblower were a woman?
   1 2 3 4 5
4. a woman were hired as the head chef at your favorite restaurant?
   1 2 3 4 5
5. the technician who arrived to service your computer were female?
   1 2 3 4 5
6. your new boss were a woman.
   1 2 3 4 5
7. the lawyer that was recommended to you were a woman?
   1 2 3 4 5
8. the new doctor turned out to be female?
   1 2 3 4 5
9. the dentist you have to go to were a woman?
   1 2 3 4 5
10. the real estate agent showing you a house were female?
    1 2 3 4 5

B. Now compare your feelings with your partner's. Discuss why you feel the way you do in each situation.

APPENDIX E
Interaction

INTERACTION

You are a member of the Board of a new French conglomerate which is taking over Robertsons Ltd., a smaller, old, established company. You want to make the changeover as smooth as possible. You have to consider the potential problems arising from the following circumstances:

- some executives will lose their jobs
- some will have to take an early retirement
- others will be reclassified
- several will stay on in the same position but at a lower salary
- some employees will have to relocate because the less productive branches of Robertsons will be closed down. Many of these people will be offered jobs with your head office which is in a French-speaking part of the country. In fact, 75% of the population speak French.
- some of the machinery at Robertsons will be replaced with new computerized equipment; therefore, many people will need retraining. Your training programs are in French.
- the employees at Robertsons belong to a different union.

You have decided that the way to make the changeover successful is to minimize stress. Discuss the problems which might arise and the stress factors involved; then develop your action plan.

Be prepared to give either a written or oral report.

COURSE DESCRIPTION

This communicative language course will cover the following areas:

1. Pronunciation
   - final -s, -r, -th
   - English word - and sentence - stress
   - English intonation patterns
2. Vocabulary Building
   - New words
   - Prefixes and suffixes
   - Synonyms
   - Deducing meaning from context
3. Grammar
   - Individualized Grammar Review
4. Speaking/Listening
   - Social
   - Business
     - in pairs
     - in small groups
     - in large groups
5. Reading
   - Business
   - General topics - As stimulus to discussion

EXPECTATIONS

In a 45-hour course, you can expect to achieve the following:

Pronunciation:

1. Awareness of the sounds which cause problems for French speakers.
2. The ability to make the sounds correctly on request.
3. The correct production of the sounds in conversation some of the time.

Vocabulary:

1. A moderate increase in your productive vocabulary.
2. A large increase in your receptive vocabulary.
3. Mastery of strategies which will enable you to cope with unknown words.

Grammar:

1. An awareness of points of grammar which cause problems for all Francophones.
2. An awareness of your own grammatical problems.
3. The ability to produce grammatically correct statements on request.
4. The ability to produce spontaneous grammatically correct statements some of the time (for intermediate level students) or much of the time (for advanced students).

Speaking:

More confidence in large and small groups.

APPENDIX G
Course Evaluation

COURSE EVALUATION

Write your answers in English or French

1. Do you feel more comfortable now speaking English than you felt before this course?

2. Do you need more confidence?

3. Do you think you make fewer mistakes now than you made before?

   (a) Do you think you communicate more effectively now?
   (b) Are you satisfied with your level of communication in English?

4. When you communicate in English, do you use

   (a) the vocabulary you learned in class?
   (b) the grammar you learned in class?
   (c) the pronunciation you learned in class?

5. Which of the following would you prefer?

   (a) 4 1/2 hours once a week
   (b) 3 hours once a week
   (c) 3 hours twice a week
   (d) 2 hours twice a week

6. Which of these was the most useful to you?

   (a) grammar
   (b) pronunciation/stress
   (c) vocabulary
   (d) reading
   (e) interactions

COURSE EVALUATION

7. Which kind of interactions did you prefer?
   (a) 2 people
   (b) 3 people
   (c) 4 people
   (d) the whole class

8. What did you like best about the course?

9. What did you like least?

10. Was there anything in the course that disappointed you? If yes, say what it was.

11. Was there anything in the course that surprised you? If yes, say what it was.

12. What improvements do you suggest for this course?

13. If you continue studying English, what would you like in your next course?

14. Comments, suggestions, complaints, criticism.